

Das Erbe des Origenes bei Gregor von Nyssa: Protologie und Eschatologie im Kontext des Origenismus. By NIKOLAI KIEL. Pp. 653. (Adamantina, 24.) Munster: Aschendorff, 2022. ISBN 978 3 402 13760 4. Hardback €94.

THIS stupendous work of scholarship is a revised version of the author's 2021 Münster Habilitationsschrift, and is the first full-length study of the relationship between Origen of Alexandria and Gregory of Nyssa. It expounds their views on protology and eschatology, which include their anthropology and cosmology, but it does not carry the investigation into the fields of Trinitarian theology, Christology, the atonement, the role and interpretation of Scripture, or ecclesiology. Subsequent volumes might tackle these themes and reveal still more about the relationship between the two theologians, no doubt the foremost intellects among the Greek Fathers.

If one approaches protology and eschatology in an atomistic way, they can look like quaint collections of archaic legend, and their study can seem no more engaging or important than stamp collecting. Kiel's great achievement is to unroll the entire system of thought of both thinkers on the beginning and end of the universe, showing its deeply reflected systematic coherence, in such a way that the details over which specialists have tended to quarrel somewhat myopically come into luminous focus. Such tricky issues as the relation between minds, souls, and bodies, which trip up even careful scholars, are sorted out definitively in a vivid concrete history of thought. To achieve this, Kiel chose to be guided not by the history of research but by the texts themselves, letting Origen and Gregory speak to us in their own words at the foot of every page.

In the broad daylight that this method of exposition generates, the influential misunderstandings of various scholars, such as Harnack (p. 487), Bardenheuer (p. 491), Balthasar (p. 279), Ramelli (p. 273), Uthemann (p. 275), and Zachhuber (p. 141), can be quietly corrected; and their correct insights validated. Kiel confronts particularly Jean Daniélou, who established the common view of Gregory as 'overcoming Origenism', showing that in fact Gregory takes up the structure of Origen's thinking on every aspect of protology and eschatology, with varying emphases, but never contradicting him. Mistakes are hard to avoid, given the subtlety of Origen's views on the origin and embodiment of souls and on the destiny of body and soul in post-mortem judgement

and subsequent *apokatastasis*. Confusion abounded even in the third and fourth centuries, and more so today when the topics have become so remote. A set of pious received ideas stemming largely from the ancient controversies has held sway among modern scholars, leading them to protest, almost as if ‘virtue signalling’, that Origen never upheld the pre-existence of souls, the penal nature of embodiment, or universal salvation, or that if he did, at least Gregory kept himself free from the contamination of such suspect ideas. Only comprehensive and methodical exposition can restore an authoritative perspective.

While French scholars have limned a soft profile of Origen as a pastoral, biblical, contemplative man of the church, this book shows that he was also a serious systematic thinker; the similar emphasis in Hal Koch and Franz Heinrich Kettler, neglected in the French and English literature, is validated with richer documentation. For this there is no need to seek out fragments of dubious provenance or to discredit Rufinus in favour of Jerome or Justinian; the text of *De Principiis* as we have it amply confirms the bulk of what Kiel tells us. One wonders whether it has been read diagonally or distractedly by many scholars. Nor is the speculative Origen confined to the early Platonizing works, *De Principiis* and the first books of the *Commentary on John*, for the *Contra Celsum* and the *Commentary on Matthew*, late works, provide a wealth of speculative insight as well. Kiel notes here and there the specific influence of Platonism but does not pursue this aspect intensively. The currently popular theme of Origen as a foundational thinker of human freedom finds support in Kiel’s findings, but in a way that never allows one to forget the archaic contexts in which this emerges (for instance, the discussion of a possible future fall of free souls even after the final *apokatastasis*, p. 341), thus checking any facile leaps from Origen to modern philosophical concerns.

So far I have discussed only one half of this immense work. The other is the panorama of Origenistic tradition into which Gregory is inserted, in searching accounts of how Dionysius of Alexandria (pp. 233–7), Pamphilus of Caesarea (pp. 246–9, 503–4), Eusebius of Caesarea (pp. 250–7, 504–13), Didymus the Blind (pp. 258–73, 514–36), and Evagrius Ponticus (pp. 273–93, 536–66) developed Origen’s vision and how the more idiosyncratic aspects of this vision were resisted by Peter I of Alexandria (pp. 237–41, 487–93) and especially Methodius of Olympus (pp. 241–6, 493–503). Here the method of exposition used for the two protagonists is again

deployed to illuminating effect, and a host of exquisite and piquant details fleshes out the intellectual profiles of the thinkers discussed. One is persuaded to respect them all as thinkers, not mere purveyors of legendary lore. We learn that Origen's colleague and successor Heraklas affirmed the resurrection of the spiritual body but denied that of the flesh, and was corrected by Peter I, who decried any influence of Greek philosophy (p. 241) and enacted the second rejection of Origen by the Alexandrian church (p. 487), yet followed Origen in asserting that the resurrected body is clothed with immortality so as to be able to sustain the pure and radiant air (*Αήρ, Αιθήρ*) of heaven (p. 492; see *Contra Celsum* 3.42). But all such details acquire their significance within the broad movement of what here emerges as a great intellectual saga, not just a batch of idle controversies. The level of discussion subsequently declined with the bad-tempered interventions of Epiphanius, Jerome, and Theophilus.

Finally, I would note that Kiel's study is of more than historical interest. While most of what he discusses is archaic and fits uneasily into *le croyable disponible* (Ricoeur) today, the huge effort here chronicled to think about the origins and ends of humanity (in an implicit critical struggle with the Platonist world vision) provides a challenging model to theology today. The synergy between biblical authorities and philosophical rationality could hardly have been better accomplished. Today we need a comparable synergy between biblical proclamations and evolutionary cosmology and anthropology.

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